

THE VOICES

A Play in One Act



BY

HAROLD GODDARD

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HAROLD GODDARD
(†)

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PERSONS

JONATHAN DARCY.

MARY DARCY—his wife.

JEAN DARCY—their daughter.

EDGAR DARCY—Jean's older brother.

KENNETH DARCY—her twin brother.

ELIZABETH CHESTER—her married sister.

MALCOLM WEST—her fiancé.

DANIEL WEST, called "Uncle Dan"—Malcolm's father.

THE SCENE

The entire action takes place in the living-room of the Darcy cottage.

Scene I—The Call—An autumn afternoon.

Scene II—The Parting—The next afternoon.

Scene III—The Question—The same evening.

Scene IV—The Return — An evening many months later.

Scene V—The Voices — Very late the same night.

Scene VI—The Departure—The next morning.

NOTE

It would have been technically quite easy to reduce the number of scenes in this play. But such an arrangement would have marred the intended effect, which was, not to concentrate the action, but to give a series of quick cross-sections through the life of the heroine. . . . It may be added that it is quite futile to attempt a production of this play unless there is available for the part of Jean a girl of distinctly poetical temperament, one who has at least an inkling, in the range of her own experience, of what "The Voices" meant to Jean.

The Voices

SCENE I.

“The Call.”

[*The living-room in a country cottage. The late afternoon sun streams in from a western window over the soft brown hair of a girl of seventeen or eighteen, who lies outstretched, chin upon hand, on a sofa, reading. So lost is she in the world of imagination that at first only a glimpse is afforded of the eager face bent low over the book before her. At length, however, she turns the last page, and a moment later, taking a deep breath, looks up, gazing off into vacancy, her lips parted, her cheeks flushed, her face overspread with a mingled expression of wonder and inspiration. At last, rising to a kneeling posture, she turns to a picture at the front of the volume she has been reading and studies it intently. Then, clasping the book in her arms, she gets up and going over to the window stands there gazing out, not at the landscape, however, but still at some inner vision.*]

A young man steals in at the door.]

THE YOUNG MAN

Jean! [*He embraces her.*]

JEAN

Why, Malcolm, how you startled me! I had forgotten where I was. I have been reading. [*Clasping the book to her breast.*] It's wonderful, Malcolm, wonderful! Have you ever read her story?—Joan of Arc.

MALCOLM

Yes, but . . .

JEAN

Think what it would be to be like her!

MALCOLM

But . . .

JEAN

I wonder what the voices were she heard. Do you suppose they were real voices? . . . Why, what is it, Malcolm?

MALCOLM

I . . . we've got to go.

JEAN

Not . . . not to the war?

MALCOLM

Yes; the call has come at last. We leave tomorrow.

JEAN

No! [*They embrace each other passionately. They cannot speak.*]

MALCOLM

I'm glad, now, mother didn't live. It would have killed her.

JEAN

Malcolm! This doesn't mean Kenneth will have to go?

MALCOLM

How old is he?

JEAN

Why! we are twins, you know.

MALCOLM

Of course! And you were eighteen in the spring. Then he will have to go.

JEAN

It will break mother's heart. [*They are silent.*]

MALCOLM

I can't wait any longer, dearest. . . . There's so much to be done. I'll come this evening to . . . to say good-bye. [*Throwing back his shoulders and smiling.*] There! What actions for a soldier! . . . Here's Kenneth now. Good-bye.

[*He kisses her; she follows him to the door as he goes out.*

Kenneth, Jean's twin brother, a rather pale delicate youth, comes in.]

KENNETH

What is Malcolm off so fast for?

JEAN

Oh, Kenneth . . . [*She cannot bring herself to break the news.*]

KENNETH

What?

JEAN

Did you . . . have you . . . have you ever read this book?

KENNETH

[*After looking at Jean, perplexed.*] Joan of Arc? Not this; but I have read about her. [*Looking at the frontispiece.*] Here is a picture of her listening to the voices. How wide her eyes are!

KENNETH

Why, Jean! did you ever stop to think!

JEAN

What?

KENNETH

Your name!

JEAN

My name! What do you mean?

KENNETH

Just drop the "y" and it is just like hers. Jeanne D'Arc—Jean Dare-y.

JEAN

Why! Let me see! How strange!

KENNETH

The "c" of course sounds different. They look the same, though. It was seeing yours written there right under hers that made me notice.

[*The rapt expression has returned to Jean's face.*]

KENNETH

[*Half laughing.*] Jean, perhaps there's something great in store for you. Did mother ever tell you what they say an old gypsy woman said, down by the mill, only a month or so before we two were born?

JEAN

No; what?

KENNETH

That within a year a child would be born in the neighborhood who would grow up to make this village famous. . . . Perhaps you're the one. 'T wouldn't surprise me, Jean. Or anybody else that really knows you.

JEAN

Don't be foolish, Kenneth.

KENNETH

You don't know what the minister told mother. . . . Well, anyway, I'm glad the day's gone by when women go to war. It's bad enough for men to. [*Suddenly catching sight of something through the window.*] Why! there's father! and Edgar!—coming home at this hour! Jean, something must have happened!

[*Kenneth dashes out the door, but returns a moment later followed by his father and brother. Edgar Darcy is a big robust young man, a striking contrast, physically, with Kenneth.*]

EDGAR

Hurrah, Jean! We're called at last. [*Aiming an imaginary rifle; brandishing an imaginary sword.*] Just let me at 'em!

JONATHAN DARCY

Where's mother?

MARY DARCY

[*Entering from the kitchen, followed by Elizabeth, Jean's older sister, who carries a bundle of shawls and comforters, presumably containing a baby.*] Here I am.

JONATHAN

The word has come. We leave tomorrow.

MARY

"We"? Not . . .

JONATHAN

[*Grimly.*] Yes. The boys too.

MARY

Not Kenneth!

JONATHAN

Yes; Kenneth too. [*Taking a newspaper from his pocket.*] Read for yourself. . . . [*Elizabeth seizes the paper from his hand and searches tremblingly through it for something she is evidently fearful of finding.*]

JONATHAN

[*His hand on his wife's shoulder as she embraces Kenneth.*] Brace up, mother. You may be frightened about the rest of us; but it will be months before the boy could be placed on the firing line. He will have weeks of drilling first. We'll hope 'twill all be over before that.

KENNETH

[*Suddenly crying out shrilly.*] I don't want to go! I don't want to kill anybody! Why should I kill anybody?

EDGAR

You mollycoddle. [*Acting out his words.*] I hope before another month has gone by, I'll have driven a bayonet into a dozen of those beggars' carcasses—and heard it crunch on their ribs, too, when I turned it round. The confounded scoundrels!

[Elizabeth gives a low cry and falls almost fainting on the sofa. The paper drops from her hand upon the floor.]

MARY

Not Alfred? *[She rushes to Elizabeth's side trying to take the baby from her daughter; but Elizabeth clasps the child to her heart convulsively. Jonathan Darcy has picked up the paper and scans its columns hastily.]*

MARY

Is it?

JONATHAN

Yes; killed in the bayonet charge the second day.

MARY

[Bending over the child, whom Elizabeth still strains to her breast.] One more little one without a father.

JEAN

He'll never know.

MARY

Look at his little hand. . . .

MARY

And Alfred was just like him once. . . . Ah, if the men had made those little bodies! . . .

[A sudden thought strikes Jean. Unconsciously tightening her clasp on the volume which she still holds, she stands gazing at something far away. The rest are silent.]

EDGAR

Well, we must get ready just the same.

JONATHAN

Yes; the country calls us; there is no time to lose.

[CURTAIN]

SCENE II.

"The Parting."

[It is late afternoon of the next day. The father and brothers are just saying good-bye. Malcolm is also there, and his father, Daniel West, the latter a white-haired man of sixty-five whose manner is an odd mixture of crustiness and good humor. The prospective soldiers, except Kenneth, are clad in khaki. Elizabeth now wears black.]

Jonathan Darcy has taken his wife aside and is whispering his last words of farewell; while Kenneth, his arm about his mother, bows his head on her shoulder. Jean, to hide her tears, has turned to the window. Elizabeth has stolen up behind her and takes her sister's hand in hers. Across the room Malcolm is conversing in low tones with his father. Edgar, impatient to be off, waits near the door.]

MALCOLM

And father, if . . . if I should never come back, you'll . . . take good care of Jean? Don't let her grieve for me . . . forever. She'll find some other man to love her just as . . . no, not as much . . . but someone who will love her.

DANIEL

I'll look out for her, Mal. But, come, come, there's no call for makin' all the funeral arrangements in advance. The whole troop of 'em will be sittin' round smokin' the pipe of peace long before you ever hear the whistle of a bullet. Mark my word!

EDGAR

It's quarter of five. We must be going.

JONATHAN

Yes, it's time.

EDGAR

[To Kenneth.] Brace up, little brother, and be a man.

MARY

[*Taking Malcolm aside.*] Don't worry about your father, Malcolm. We'll keep him here.

MALCOLM

[*Eagerly.*] Oh, will you? But I'm afraid he'll never stay.

MARY

We'll make him.

JEAN

Malcolm!

MALCOLM

[*To Jean.*] Wait here. I'll come back for a moment when they're gone.

JEAN

Kenneth! Father! Edgar! Kiss me. I'm not going with you to the train.

[*Her father and Edgar kiss her. Kenneth embraces her passionately and whispers something in her ear. He tears himself away and they all go out excepting Jean. She watches by the door. Presently Malcolm comes back and the lovers rush into each other's arms.*]

MALCOLM

There . . . isn't anything we can say . . . is there, dearest?

JEAN

No; except—I love you.

MALCOLM

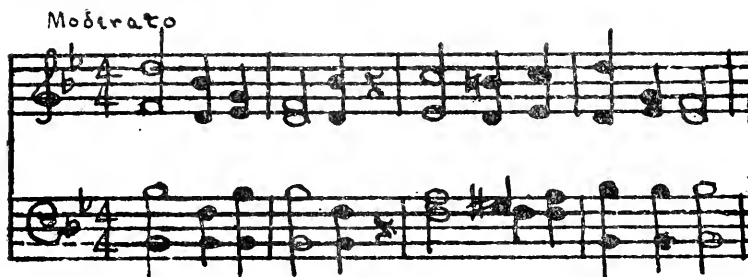
Oh, I love you!

MALCOLM

Jean, there's just a moment left. [*Pointing to the piano in one corner.*] Play something. You've played to me so many times.

[*Jean seats herself at the piano. Though it is an old instrument, it is in good tune, and Jean, tears in her*

eyes, puts her whole soul into the music. She plays the familiar Thuringian Popular Air:]



[She plays the song through twice.]

MALCOLM

I've got to go.

[They embrace for the last time. Malcolm rushes out. Jean watches for a moment at the window; then she sinks down into a chair and buries her face in her hands. Suddenly, however, she gets up, and with a look of determination throws back her head and shoulders. She smiles, and looks up with arms outstretched.]

[CURTAIN]

SCENE III.

“The Question.”

[The same evening. The family has finished supper and is gathered round the table. Daniel West is still with them. He stands at the window now reading a letter. Elizabeth sits a little apart, silent and preoccupied. The baby's basket is in a corner of the room.]

MARY

I can't understand. I can't understand. Why does it have to be? . . . Jean, your teachers always called you the brightest girl they ever taught. Do you understand it?

JEAN

No. I've read, and I've asked questions, and I've thought; and still I can't make out.

MARY

Uncle Daniel, you're always reading; you know everything. What is it really all about? Why are we fighting?

DANIEL

[*Putting his letter in his pocket and coming from the window.*] Pretty late in the evening to tackle that! You've got to go back, to take it in, a full fifty years, or maybe more.

JEAN

No, that's not what we mean. I don't care what happened long ago. I want to know the reason, *now*, why we are fighting.

DANIEL

An' I tell you there isn't any reason "now."

MARY

You mean to say they're fighting without a reason?

DANIEL

Don't talk like a fool, Mary. I mean you've got to burrow down into history to find the reason. [*Here, and elsewhere, the tartness of some of Uncle Daniel's replies is considerably mitigated by the not unkindly smile that plays about the corners of his mouth.*]

MARY

Well, all I've got to say in that case, then, is this: if studying history makes out a good reason for such a bad thing as this war, then the less history there is the better.

DANIEL

Don't talk nonsense, Mary!—leastwise any more of it than you're obliged to, bein' a woman.

MARY

Come, Daniel, don't get vexed. We're ready to listen.

ELIZABETH

Where is the ink?

MARY

There on the shelf beside the clock. Who are you writing to?

ELIZABETH

I'll tell you—when it's done.

MARY

I may not understand you, Daniel. But I've got a grain of common sense left; and I say it's madness, sheer ravin' madness. If there was any reason for a quarrel, why didn't they get together and talk it over like sensible beings?

DANIEL

"Talk it over!" If you don't talk for all the world just like a woman. "Talk it over!"

JEAN

Well, why shouldn't they?

DANIEL

"Talk it over!" Hmp! Don't you know that *everything* in this world is settled by force?

JEAN

That isn't true.

DANIEL

It happens to be true, though. Don't you pay taxes on this little cottage?

JEAN

Yes.

DANIEL

Why?

MARY

Why, we have to.

DANIEL

"Have to!" Precisely. If you didn't, a sheriff would come and sell you up. An' if you objected an' tried to put him out, they'd shove you into jail. I'd like to know what that is, if it isn't force. All law is force.

JEAN

What!

DANIEL

"All law is force," is what I said.

JEAN

I thought law was justice.

DANIEL

You thought blamed crooked then. Just like a woman.

JEAN

But it ought to be justice.

DANIEL

What's the use of tellin' what it ought to be, when it isn't? Maybe you think it was "justice," as you call it, when that feller from the city—what-was-his-name?—swindled old Nancy Lang out of her farm. He did it in the law courts.

MARY

That was sheer robbery!

DANIEL

Correct! That's what it was. Oh, I've watched it, and I've read about it—and I've felt it too in my time! . . . In the beginnin', you see, the feller that had the most power went around makin' the other fellers obey him with a sword. But that took time and was otherwise inconvenient; to say nothin' of the unpleasant words and feelin's it aroused. So he invented some rules to take the place of the sword. Those rules were the first laws. I'm not denyin' that the change was in many respects a desirable one. I'm not denyin' even that in the course of time, since the people have begun

to get a little of the say, some of the laws have grown a good bit fairer. But in the main, a law is just a sheet o' paper to hide the sword behind it. To hide it, I mean, till the point sticks through an' tickles your ribs. An' I've had my ribs tickled in my day!

JEAN

Is this really true? Or are you just talking, Uncle Dan, the way you do?

DANIEL

True? Of course it's true. As true as gospel—a blamed sight truer in fact.

JEAN

Why didn't they teach us this in school?

DANIEL

Yes! why didn't they? Same reason, I take it, they don't teach anything in school worth knowin'. Maybe you don't happen to know what a school is.

JEAN

What?

DANIEL

A school is a place where they turn real things into words. You might make a conundrum out o' that. Why is a schoolma'm like a lawyer? He, he, he!

MARY

[*Her hands at her forehead.*] This is too much for me.

DANIEL

Just like a woman! It's my observation that a woman hasn't got any powers of generalization. They can't think of anythin' that reaches outside o' their back-door-yard.

MARY

I don't know about that. [*In a low tone, pointing to Elizabeth, who is still writing.*] But I know my . . . here has had her . . . killed. And I know I've got a husband of my own and two boys called to the front. What more do I want to know?

DANIEL

Just what I said! Precisely what I said! Exactly like a woman. You always have to talk about particular persons. You never get down to principles. Now this war involves some of the most far-reachin' principles . . .

MARY

I can't say as to that. But it's my opinion that a principle reaches altogether too far that begins by murderin' half the able-bodied men in . . .

DANIEL

But don't you care anything about the honor of your country?

MARY

I care about my boys.

DANIEL

Just like a woman again! For all the world like a woman.

MARY

[*Her mind wandering from the argument to the mental picture.*] Why does God let such things happen?

JEAN

It isn't God, mother, that lets them happen. It's the men. [*After a pause.*] And the women.

ELIZABETH

Mother! [*She hands her mother her finished letter.*]

MARY

. . . Elizabeth! what do you mean? Are you crazy? Have you forgotten your baby?

DANIEL and JEAN

What! What!

ELIZABETH

You can take care of him, mother.

JEAN

What is it?

[*Daniel takes the letter from Mary's hand.*]

MARY

[*To Jean.*] She's written asking to be taken as a nurse.

ELIZABETH

I've got to do my part. I owe it to Alfred's memory to do my part. The men make their sacrifice. We must make ours. If they are set on carrying this bloody business through we women must do what we can to mend what they leave. They fight. We must nurse. [*With a sudden direct appeal.*] Come with me, Jean!

[*Jean is silent.*]

ELIZABETH

Come! You have no . . . [*Gulping back her sobs.*] baby to leave.

JEAN

I can't *now*.

ELIZABETH

"Now"? What do you mean by "now"?

JEAN

After what Uncle Dan has said. It's set me thinking. I've got to think it out.

MARY

Don't Beth! He needs you.

[*Elizabeth goes over and gazes down at the baby in his basket.*]

ELIZABETH

I must. The harder it is the more certain I am it is my duty. [*Sealing the letter.*] I'm going to post it. [*She goes out.*]

[*The three sit silent.*]

JEAN

Uncle Dan, can you lend me some books that will tell me more about these things?

DANIEL

About what things?

JEAN

What we were talking about: justice and law
and . . .

DANIEL

I could; but you'd make neither head nor tail of
'em. They're too hard diggin' for a woman. Keep
where you belong, girl. Look at your sister. You're
goin' to let her go alone?

JEAN

Yes.

DANIEL

You ought to be ashamed.

JEAN

[*Very quietly.*] I'm not ashamed. . . . I'll
come and get those books tomorrow.

[CURTAIN]

SCENE IV.

"The Return."

[*The same room, a good many months afterward,
late in the evening.*]

*Jean stands stirring a bowl of hot gruel, reading
meanwhile from a large volume on the table. Mary's
voice is heard in an inner room.*

MARY

Are you ready for your gruel, Jonathan?

JONATHAN

[*His voice very faint and drowsy.*] Yes; a very
little.

MARY

[*Coming in.*] Still reading, Jean? I declare; I've
hardly seen you without a book within your reach the

last ten months. And such books! . . . Is it cool enough?

JEAN

I think so. Father is still awake? [*In a low tone.*]
What did the doctor say?

MARY

He said he's doing well. But he's still anxious, I can see, about the shoulder. [*She carries a cup of gruel out, but comes back with it immediately.*] He's fallen asleep! And it wasn't a minute ago he answered me. . . . You'd better get to bed, my dear. I'll wait for Uncle Daniel and give father the gruel later, if he wakes.

JEAN

Well, good night. [*She kisses her mother and goes out.*]

[*Mary busies herself about the room. Presently Uncle Daniel bursts in excitedly.*]

DANIEL

They have surrendered! That means the war is done!

MARY

Really? Thank God! Thank God!

DANIEL

Let me tell Jonathan.

MARY

No! He's dropped asleep for the first time since four this morning. Don't waken him, even for this.

DANIEL

And listen: Edgar is home.

MARY

What! Edgar?

DANIEL

Yes; I saw him at the station. He's to be driven up.

MARY

He's not been hurt?

DANIEL

No; he's been sick, though, and was sent home from the front a month ago. He's dreadfully weak, but he says he's gettin' better.

MARY

No news from Kenneth?

DANIEL

I've heard nothin'. . . . Here's Edgar now!

[*Daniel rushes to the door and helps in Edgar. He is pale and emaciated, a changed man.*]

EDGAR

Mother!

MARY

My boy! [*She shows how shocked she is at his appearance.*]

EDGAR

Oh, but I'm getting better fast now. You should have seen me, mother, a month ago.

MARY

Poor boy! You don't look much as you did the day you left. How anxious you were to get away and fight. . . .

EDGAR

That's because I had no notion then what fighting was. [*He paces up and down excitedly.*] *I've had enough of war!* Oh, you have no conception! It's horrible. Horrible! Worse than ten thousand hells!

MARY

Don't! Don't let yourself, my boy! You can tell us all about it some other time. You've days and days ahead for that.

EDGAR

[*Paying no attention; pacing more rapidly.*]
Mother, you've no idea. You hear a shell burst some-

where over there, and splash! comes a bit of torn human flesh right in your face. You're in a charge and suddenly, without looking down, you feel a dead man's cheek under your feet. And as your boot slips off it, there comes a faint moan and you know your dead man wasn't dead after all. And then . . .

MARY

Don't, Edgar, don't! You shan't. . . . Tell me, have you heard from Kenneth?

EDGAR

[*Wheeling instantly around, a strange tone in his voice.*] Kenneth!

MARY

[*Divining.*] No!

EDGAR

You mean to say you hadn't heard! . . . Yes; killed in his first engagement. . . . But mother, you can be proud of him. I never would have guessed that that pale little brother of mine had in him the makings of a hero. By a strange chance I heard through a soldier in the hospital who was beside him. . . . [*Softly, his hand on his mother's bowed shoulder.*] You have to stand these things, mother, in these days. Every woman, almost, has to.

DANIEL

[*Hoarsely.*] You haven't heard from my boy, have you—from Malcolm?

[*Edgar bites his lips and does not speak.*]

DANIEL

Tell me. I can stand it.

EDGAR

I never dreamed that the reports. . . . [*He takes a soiled paper from his pocket and hands it to Daniel.*]

DANIEL

Where? [*Edgar points.*]

DANIEL

Little Mal! My boy!

MARY

Malcolm too?

EDGAR

Yes, Malcolm, too. Their names are there together.

MARY

Poor Jean! How shall we tell her?
[*Distant shouts and music are heard.*]

EDGAR

Hark! what is that? Oh, I remember! Down in the town. They're having bon-fires and music to celebrate.

MARY

Hush! [*Jean comes in.*]

JEAN

Edgar, is it you?

EDGAR

Yes; it's me—what is left of me. [*He embraces her.*]

JEAN

[*Feeling something in the air.*] What is it?
[*There is a tense and embarrassed silence.*]

DANIEL

Summon up your nerve, my girl. [*He hands her the paper.*]

JEAN

Not . . . [*As her eye rests on the name.*] Kenneth!

DANIEL

But look on further down.

JEAN

No! Not Malcolm!

DANIEL

[*Pointing.*] Yes, Malcolm too.

MARY

[*Repressing with an effort her impulse to take Jean in her arms.*] Come. Leave her alone. [*They go softly out.*]

[*Jean stands as if struck to stone.*]

[CURTAIN]

SCENE V.

“The Voices.”

[*It is very late the same night. Jean sits by the table in a wrapper, her white night-gown showing beneath it. She is reading (as in the first scene) from the story of Jeanne D'Arc. She finishes it, and putting down the book, sits gazing, as in a trance, before her. Her face is tear-stained, but it wears a strange calmness. Her lamp is burning dim.*]

Once or twice, very faint, strains of music come from the distant town.

Jean blows out the lamp. She goes to the window and raises the shade. Her wrapper has fallen from her shoulders, and a flood of moonlight pours in on her as she stands there clad in white.

The call of a night bird is heard from outside.

Suddenly, the girl starts as if she heard something. Drawing back, she gazes, with held breath, about the room; then turns again to the open window. She stands there transfixed—her hands crossed on her breast, her lips parted—listening. There are clouds in the sky without, and the moonlight ebbs and flows over her white figure, coming now faintly, now in full silvery lustre. She falls on her knees before the window, looking up.]

JEAN

I hear you. I hear you. I'll come. I'll come.

[CURTAIN]

SCENE VI.

“The Departure.”

[It is early the next morning. Edgar wrapped up in shawls reclines in a big chair. Daniel stands at the window. Mary comes in.]

MARY

She must be pretty broken up. She never fails to help me with the breakfast. *[She goes out.]*

EDGAR

Mother is bearing up under it wonderfully, isn't she?

DANIEL

Yes; like a soldier.

EDGAR

She worshipped the very ground that Kenneth trod on. Kenneth and Jean—I always felt she loved them a little more than she did Beth and me. Don't know that I blame her, either.

MARY

[Coming in again very hurriedly.] Edgar, I'm frightened! Jean's bed has not been slept in.

EDGAR and DANIEL

What!

[Jean comes in. She is in travelling costume. She wears a hat and carries a hand-bag and umbrella, which she places in a chair.]

MARY

Why, Jean, where have you been? I was so frightened.

JEAN

I've not been anywhere, mother. But I'm going somewhere. I'm going to leave you. *[Her voice is low but rings with clear determination.]*

MARY

Leave us!

JEAN

Yes; let me tell you.

JEAN

Do you remember an evening—it was the evening of the day when father and the boys and Malcolm were called away—when we three, you and I and Uncle Daniel, got to talking about the war? [*She turns to Daniel.*] Mother and I had been speaking of the horror of it all, and wondering why it had to be. And then you, in that way you have, said something about “all human things being war at heart”; that laws and government were only force and violence in disguise.

DANIEL

Well, so they are. What of it?

JEAN

It was a new idea to me, and set me thinking. I asked you to lend me some books that would explain these things; and you did.

MARY

[*To Edgar.*] Yes, heaven knows she’s been reading nothing else for months. Books *that* thick, and dry as . . . deliver me!

JEAN

Yes, I’ve been reading; and the things I’ve read and the things I’ve thought about—and, still more, this dreadful war that never for a moment has been absent from my mind—have been making a change . . . *in here* . . . until gradually I’ve become a different girl. The whole world has grown different.

[*Something in her voice has imposed deep silence on the others.*]

JEAN

Well, last night . . . I don’t know whether it was these things I have been thinking of . . . or the word that came about Malcolm and Kenneth . . .

or the book I was reading in here after you had all gone to bed . . . I guess maybe it was all of them together . . . anyway . . . I had . . . there came . . . a wonderful . . . I don't know whether I dreamed it . . . and yet I was awake . . . I seemed to hear voices. . . . I thought once I almost saw . . . Oh, I can't make it clear! Anyway, whatever it was, it made things finally plain to me. Now I know I have a work to do. And so I'm going.

DANIEL

Hm!

MARY

Jean! . . . But I see your mind is quite made up.

JEAN

Yes; nothing was ever so clear to me before—(except that I loved Malcolm).

MARY

But this work—what is it?

JEAN

I don't know that I'd better try to tell you. It may sound foolish to you. But it isn't foolish.

MARY

Tell us.

JEAN

Well, you see, as I read, I came gradually to the conclusion that what Uncle Dan had said, in spite of his exaggerated way of putting it, was true; all through the ages, from the beginning, men have ruled over one another by *force*. Their laws and their governments, even their religions, have been, for the most part, just *power*, the power of the *victor* in disguise. Only when there is a revolt against the victor, or a quarrel between two victors, is the disguise thrown off and things seen as they are. And that is war.

[As she proceeds the glow of feeling deepens on Jean's face and more and more she seems to speak not so much to those before her as to something within herself.]

JEAN

It took me a long while to understand it. But then, when I thought how father and Edgar and Uncle Dan, and even Malcolm, seemed to take war for granted as it were; and how mother and Elizabeth and I, and nearly all the women that I knew, hated war and felt deep down in our hearts it was all wrong; and how, if we had had the say, it never could have come, suddenly it flashed over me!—Here men have been trying to rule over each other for thousands of years, and with how little success! What if the whole trouble with politics and law and government were the fact that they are in need of something that *women* have, and all the while they've barred the women out! . . . The more I thought of it, the more certain I became. I've been reading a good deal of history these last months. And I've been struck by the fact that the greatest leaders of men, the *really* greatest leaders—men like Christ, or Saint Francis, or Abraham Lincoln—have always had something of this womanly quality about them. Why shouldn't the same thing be true of the ideal government? The feminine element can't take the place of the masculine. But it can work beside it. They both are needed. Things will never be right until we have them both.

DANIEL

Well I'll be dinged if the girl hasn't gone daffy!

JEAN

There was one phrase you used, Uncle Daniel, as you were arguing that night with me and mother, that has come back to me, as I've been reading, over and over. "Just like a woman," you said "to care more for persons than for principles." (Principles in the

sense of general ideas, you meant, of course.) I've thought about that since then a great deal. I've watched women and listened to their conversations. And it's true; they *do* care more for persons than for principles.

DANIEL

Well, what did I tell you!

JEAN

And I'm glad they do. Did it ever occur to you that if the men who made the laws and the men who declared the wars in the past had cared a little more about persons, a good many of the wars would never have been fought and a good many of the laws never passed? It's quite true that if principles were forgotten in thinking about persons, things would be pretty helpless and chaotic. But it's also true that when persons are forgotten in thinking about principles, things get pretty cruel and unjust. What is needed, I believe, is to think about them both at the same time. And the best way of getting that is to have the women help the men in working out these problems.

DANIEL

Vengeance on me if I ever dreamed in lendin' the girl those books . . . Look at your mother, child, and learn that it's a woman's place to be tender an' lovin'.

JEAN

"Tender and loving"; yes. And the world needs tenderness and love in its governments as well as in its homes. *That's just what I've discovered.* . . . Do you remember, Uncle Dan, the night Elizabeth decided to go and be a nurse, how you told me I ought to be ashamed for not going with her?

DANIEL

Yes, and I wish you'd gone rather than stayed here and come to this nonsensical end.

JEAN

For Elizabeth it was right to go. It's right for women to nurse, to heal the wounds that men give each other. But wouldn't it be greater and better if they could prevent those wounds from being given in the first place? We women, in the past, have done only the lesser of our duties.

DANIEL

Hmp! An' while you're doin' your new duties, who, I'd like to inquire, is goin' to bring the babies into the world, and tend to 'em when they're brought? The men? Nice arrangement! About on a level with all your freak ideas!

JEAN

I haven't forgotten the babies. Indeed I haven't! The women can do both. I know they can.

DANIEL

The women can do a lot, can't they? Mighty fine talk.

EDGAR

Shut up, Uncle Dan. Don't you see that she's in earnest.

DANIEL

[*Throwing up his hands.*] You, Edgar, defendin' such notions! Well!

JEAN

But it was you, Uncle Dan, that first put them in my head—you and the books you lent me.

DANIEL

Am I responsible if a woman twists what I say all out o' shape? And as for the books: there's some ideas that had better be left inside 'em.

JEAN

I don't think so. If they're good ideas, I think they should be used.

DANIEL

Just like a woman! The minute a new scheme pops into her head, off she's got to go and try it out!

MARY

But you're not really going to leave us, Jean?

JEAN

Yes. I told you. These thoughts—all vague and misty—have been in my mind a long time. But last night, all at once, they became clear, and I heard . . . I thought I heard . . . something . . . voices . . . telling me to come. So I'm going.

MARY

Where are you going?

JEAN

I don't know just where. To the city. The way will open, I know. I know I have lots to learn. But I have money enough for a little while, and then—Malcolm, you remember, long before the war, when we were first engaged, took out a little insurance in my name. I shall have that to help for a while longer. He would be glad to have me use it so. . . . I know it will seem strange to you: to hurry off so suddenly. But you can't understand. I've got to. My trunk is packed. I shall go this morning.

DANIEL

The child's stark crazy.

MARY

My girl! It's not in me to try to keep you.

[Jean turns her head and looks out of the window.]

MARY

There's a light on the girl's face. She must be right.

[CURTAIN]

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